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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000639

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: SAYYAF: U.S. SHOULD PUBLICLY SUPPORT KARZAI  
REMAINING DURING INTERIM PERIOD

REF: KABUL 498

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) MP Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf told the DCM on 3/17 the U.S. should publicly support Karzai remaining in office through the inauguration of the new president. Most Afghans support Karzai remaining because he is a known quantity, and they fear the unpredictable effects of a loya jirga or a caretaker government. If the U.S. announces its support, Parliament will follow, Sayyaf asserted. Responding to the DCM's question whether Parliament would formalize its support through a vote or some other mechanism, Sayyaf just repeated himself, apparently uncertain how Parliament would signal its support for Karzai continuing during the interim period.

¶2. (C) Public U.S. support and follow up private meetings with opposition leaders would force the opposition's acquiescence to Karzai remaining president after the constitutional expiration of his term. Sayyaf plans to reach out to United Front leader Burhanuddin Rabbani and ask him to push the rest of the opposition to publicly settle the question of the interim period in favor of Karzai remaining through the next inauguration. Once a decision is reached, opposition leaders should hold a press conference and announce their support for Karzai remaining in order to quell growing public fear of post-5/22 unrest.

¶3. (C) The DCM told Sayyaf the U.S. strongly agrees Karzai should remain in office after the 5/22 constitutional expiration of his term and through the inauguration of the next president. Embassy leadership and DSRAP Paul Jones have repeatedly expressed this policy in private meetings with political leaders, the DCM noted, and will take Sayyaf's suggestion of a public statement under consideration. However, the U.S. understands opposition concerns that Karzai will unfairly leverage government resources to aid his re-election campaign. Accordingly, the U.S. encourages Karzai to reach out to the opposition and find means to reassure them that he will not use his position to unfair advantage.

¶4. (C) Sayyaf declined to speculate on which opposition candidate would mount the strongest challenge to Karzai. A safe and fair election, the result of which all Afghans support is the most important goal, Sayyaf said. In order to really challenge Karzai, however, the opposition must unite behind one candidate, likely a Pashtun. Pashtuns are the majority group, and as Afghanistan's greatest challenges are in Pashtun areas, a Pashtun would be better positioned to bring peace to the country, Sayyaf claimed.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. Sayyaf's talking points are much the same as ours: support for a free, fair, and safe election accepted as credible by the Afghan public, and Karzai remaining in office during the interim period. Sayyaf is no doubt correct a public U.S. statement would help push Parliament and the opposition to support Karzai staying in office through the next inauguration. However, we should not let Afghans make

this a solely U.S. solution. All parties need to compromise  
to find a durable approach.  
WOOD